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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5797  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6192  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2109  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5014  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4728  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 6951  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002432

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS, DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: PUNJAB CONTINUES TO SIMMER OVER RELIGIOUS LEADER'S  
"BLASPHEMOUS" ACT

Classified By: PolOff Joel Ehrendreich for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

Dera Sacha Sauda Refuses to Apologize  
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¶1. (SBU) Since May 14, Punjab has been in a state of crisis over an alleged sacrilegious act. Sikh leaders have demanded that Sant Gurmeet Singh Ram Rahim, the head of the Dera Sacha Sauda religious sect apologize for insulting their faith by dressing up as the tenth holy Guru in Sikhism, Guru Govind Singh. Although Rahim came just short of issuing an apology, expressing regret for any misunderstandings he may have caused, Sikh leaders deemed his gesture unacceptable, and have called a state-wide bandh (strike) on May 22. They want all Dera Sacha Sauda campuses throughout the state closed until Rahim provides what they define as an acceptable apology. Sikhs in neighboring states of Haryana and Jammu have honored the bandh call.

¶2. (SBU) As tensions rose, during the week of May 14, the Central government sent thousands of paramilitary forces to Punjab and Haryana, where the Dera Sacha Sauda headquarters is located. The media reported isolated incidents of violence in Punjab, including some Sikh clashes with police, but overall the bandh was peaceful in both Haryana and Punjab. In Jammu state, Sikh protestors burned effigies of Rahim and forced shops to close.

A Tight Fix All Around  
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¶3. (C) Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal remains in a tight bind. Performing a complicated dance, appealing to his Sikh base -- supporting their demand for an apology, while trying to maintain law and order. Only in office for four months, Badal's new government cannot afford to lose control of the situation.

¶4. (C) Badal's political coalition partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is also throwing strong rhetoric into the ring, to keep its Hindu base happy, stating "if anything goes

wrong...the government headed by Parkash Singh Badal shall be solely responsible...The BJP will not hesitate in taking hard decisions in the larger interests of the people of Punjab." While Hindus might not support the Sacha Sauda religious sect, the Sikh protests are hurting business, and traders, the traditional BJP vote bank, are losing money. Congress also has a vested interest in the dispute, since Dera Sacha Sauda supported it in the 2007 elections.

Bad for Business

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15. (C) Indian press reports that the growing confrontation in Punjab is worrying investors looking to develop the state. A meeting scheduled for May 22 to discuss the establishment of an "education city" within Chandigarh has been postponed. Investors in the power sector have also declined to visit plant sites in view of the bandh.

Khalistan Revival?

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16. (C) Perhaps the most disturbing trend developing from the communal tensions in Punjab is a resurgence of rhetoric calling for the creation of a separate Sikh state (Khalistan). Since the violent suppression of the Khalistan movement in the turbulent 80s and 90s, pro-Khalistani elements have been relegated to the fringes of society. Some Punjab watchers have begun to express fear that the dormant Khalistanis are using the gaffe of the Dera Sacha Sauda leader to re-emerge and stoke separatist sentiments in young Sikhs and the Sikh religious leadership. The uproar has created a serious challenge for the Badal government. He

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cannot allow the controversy to continue unabated, but also cannot afford to alienate his Sikh political base or the Hindu support base of his coalition partners, the BJP. Should Rahim formally submit an "acceptable" apology to the Sikh community, the crisis could quickly die down and pull the Badal government back from the brink.  
PYATT